

Trilateral Talks
(US-UK-FRG)

BACKGROUND PAPER

Parallel East-West Force Reductions

State Dept. declassification & release instructions on file

The Problem

Are Parallel Measures of Warsaw Pact Forces and NATO Forces possible and advisable? If so, by what means could they be accomplished?

Recommended Position

1. Possibility. The answer to the first part of these questions is bound to be affirmative: parallel reductions are possible, if we make any reductions, if only because we have no control over whether the Soviets might choose to match or otherwise respond to such reductions in our forces in Europe. Other papers have noted our general judgment that the Soviets would probably like, for their own economic and other reasons, to reduce their forces in Eastern Europe. We have also noted that because of Vietnam and for other reasons the Soviets have been inhibited in making such reductions, and would be particularly inhibited from formal agreement on reciprocal troop reductions. Nevertheless, parallel action by the Soviets is a distinct possibility.

2. Advisability. The question of whether we should, for our part, seek parallel action by the Soviets is a much harder one to answer. Two relatively separate cases may be distinguished: (1) the case where we approach the Soviets first and make actions on our part in some way contingent on reciprocal action by them; and (2) the case where we decide for our own reasons to proceed with certain reductions and then approach the Soviets with suggestions that they follow suit.

3. If current policy reviews indicate that reductions in our forces are justifiable only if certain parallel reductions occur in Warsaw Pact (i.e.,

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Soviet) forces on the central front, it would appear to be undesirable to engage the Soviets in negotiations on the matter at this time. Given differences among our Allies about the desirability of cutting forces, and other acute internal Alliance problems at this moment in history, we are not in a happy situation for useful negotiations with the Soviets on as sensitive an issue as the military confrontation in Central Europe. Any such negotiations are best likely to be protracted and complicated, and the fact that they were in progress would be likely to have unsettling effects on NATO. (Moreover, as noted below, the Soviets would probably not wish to negotiate with us on this subject at the present time.)

4. If our review concludes that certain reductions and changes in posture are feasible and desirable regardless of what the Soviets may do to their forces, we would likewise probably find it undesirable to engage the Soviets in prior negotiations. For one thing, such a decision would create certain problems (e.g., concerning future strategy, and, perhaps more seriously, the credibility of the US commitment in Europe) which would probably be intensified by contemporaneous negotiations with the Soviets. Certainly, the Soviets could not be relied upon to reduce our problems. In addition, however, we would in the postulated case have little bargaining leverage with the Soviets and might be placed in the embarrassing position of eventually going ahead with our cuts even though the Soviets had not met whatever conditions we put to them in the negotiations (e.g., proposals for verification of mutual cuts). Furthermore, reductions that result from an agreement would be hard to reverse if conditions should change; later replacement or modernization measures might produce tension-raising arguments, and uncertainties whether the Soviets were living up to their end of the bargain might create strains. Finally, it should be recalled that we have long maintained that agreed military adjustments in central Europe should be accompanied by progress in the political issues that divide Europe -- a point

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of considerable importance to the Germans.

5. The fact that negotiated and agreed mutual reductions are inadvisable from our point of view at this time does not mean the Soviets would therefore find such negotiations and agreements desirable, largely, but not exclusively, because of the inhibitions placed upon the USSR by Vietnam, Moscow may now find negotiations impolitic.

6. In a sense the question of whether it may be desirable to urge the Soviets to somehow match reductions we have already decided upon has been largely pre-empted by the Presidential speech of October 7 in which the Soviets were in effect invited to join in a process of unilateral but parallel reductions. On balance, the disadvantages cited for seeking parallel cuts by negotiations do not appear to operate as severely in the case of a post facto approach to the Soviets. Soviet ability to manipulate a Western decision already made and in process of implementation is smaller than their ability to confound decisions still in the making. West European, especially West German, fears of US-Soviet collusion over Central Europe would probably be less. The Soviets for their part may find it less difficult to take matching unilateral steps than agreed ones, perhaps after a discreet interval. In any case, there will be general sentiment in favor of urging the Soviets to reduce their forces, and there would appear to be no overriding reasons not to do so.

7. If we decide to proceed with cuts, and particularly if the Soviets choose to follow suit, we may wish to talk to the Soviets quietly about the desirability of avoiding any tendency to increase the firepower of remaining forces by increasing their nuclear elements. The Soviets already show some concern that this may be one result of Western cuts now being speculated about in the press. Any such approach to Moscow would need careful preparation, and indeed the question of whether it is desirable at all requires further examination.

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